

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
August 19 - 25, 2011

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1. Unfreezing Assets to Meet the Critical Humanitarian Needs of the Libyan People (08-25-2011)

Fact Sheet
Office of the Spokesperson
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The UN Security Council's Libya Sanctions Committee approved a U.S. proposal to unfreeze \$1.5 billion of Libyan assets to be used to provide critical humanitarian and other assistance to the Libyan people. The U.S. request to unfreeze Libyan assets is divided into three key portions:

Transfers to International Humanitarian Organizations (up to \$500 million):

Up to \$120 million will be transferred quickly to meet unfulfilled United Nations Appeal requests responding to the needs of the Libyan people (including critical assistance to displaced Libyans). Up to \$380 million will be used for the revised UN Appeals for Libya and other humanitarian needs as they are identified by the UN or other international or humanitarian organizations.

Transfers to suppliers for fuel and other goods for strictly civilian purposes (up to \$500 million):

Up to \$500 million will be used to pay for fuel costs for strictly civilian needs (e.g., hospitals, electricity and desalinization) and for other humanitarian purchases.

Transfers to the Temporary Financial Mechanism established by the Contact Group to assist the Libyan people (up to \$500 million):

Up to \$400 million will be used for providing key social services, including education and health. Up to \$100 million will be used to address food and other humanitarian needs.

The United States crafted this proposal in close coordination with the Transitional National Council, as they assessed the needs of the Libyan people throughout the country. It responds to humanitarian concerns in a diversified way that prioritizes key needs. The United States will work urgently with the Transitional National Council to facilitate the release of these funds within days.

Safeguards

The proposal also has a number of safeguards, including a restriction that none of the funds are used for military equipment or activities. Funds given to the United Nations will be subject to existing UN safeguards. Payments for fuel costs will be confirmed by both the TNC and the vendor. Similarly, the Temporary Financing Mechanism incorporates several accounting and procedural safeguards: a Steering Board with TNC and international members (and consensus decision making); regular internal audits and external audits to be conducted by an internationally respected independent auditing firm; and an independent financial management agent (Adam Smith International) to administer the TFM account.

2. Contact Group Discusses Support for Libya's Transition (08-25-2011)

Deputy Secretary of State William Burns says the departure of the Qadhafi regime opens the door to a new future for Libya.

Burns led the U.S. delegation to a crucial meeting of the Libya Contact Group August 25 in Istanbul where representatives from 28 nations and seven international organizations urged the Libyan people to avoid revenge violence and stressed the need for national reconciliation.

“But the situation on the ground remains fluid, and the fighting has not ceased,” [Burns said at the conference](#). “We must collectively continue to call for the immediate end to the violence, and to safeguard civilian life.”

The contact group urged the U.N. Security Council to pass a resolution currently under consideration to unfreeze Libyan assets, and it called for ousted leader Muammar Qadhafi to surrender to avert further violence and bloodshed. The rebel-led Transitional National Council (TNC) is seeking to have \$5 billion in frozen assets released to provide immediate relief to Libyans.

Financial analysts have estimated that nearly \$110 billion in Libyan assets is frozen in banks worldwide, according to press reports.

The TNC has offered a reward for Qadhafi's capture. The International Criminal Court, based at The Hague in the Netherlands, has charged Qadhafi with crimes against humanity.

Efforts to stabilize Libya in the aftermath of the revolution to end Qadhafi's 42 years in power are being supported by the United States, NATO, the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Burns told delegates in Istanbul.

The Arab League is expected to seat the Transitional National Council at the league headquarters in Cairo on August 27.

“We join the Libyan people in honoring those who have worked so hard and sacrificed so much for this outcome — the courageous individuals who defended their homes and communities against Qadhafi's violence, and the nations and international institutions that came together to prevent a massacre in Benghazi and to support the people of Libya as they stood up to a tyrant,” Burns said.

“Now we must bring the same resolve to supporting the Libyan people as they rebuild their nation. Libya’s future is far from guaranteed,” he said.

The Libya Contact Group recognized the TNC as the provisional legitimate governing authority in Libya at [its July 15 meeting in Istanbul](#). Recently, the TNC gained further international standing after being recognized by Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq and Nigeria. In total, the TNC is now recognized by 54 nations as the legitimate provisional authority in Libya.

“The TNC has committed to pursue a process of inclusive democratic reform, to uphold Libya’s international obligations, to respect human rights and to disburse funds in a transparent manner to address the humanitarian and other needs of the Libyan people,” Burns told the conference.

The international community must support the TNC so it can fulfill its responsibility of providing security and basic services to the Libyan people, Burns said. That effort will require considerable coordination, he added.

Burns said NATO must continue to protect civilians under the mandate of the [U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973](#) for as long as that protection is needed.

3. General Sees Improved Afghan Governance and Security (08-25-2011)

Afghan security forces and government institutions are continuing to strengthen their capacity and earn more confidence from the Afghan people, says a U.S. coalition forces commander in Afghanistan, adding that his team is continuing its efforts to put pressure on insurgents and help Afghan authorities create conditions to foster stability and economic development.

Speaking to reporters from Bagram Air Base August 25, U.S. Army Major General Daniel Allyn, who is the commanding general of Regional Command East, said Afghan government officials and security forces operating in the areas where his unit is located “continue to grow in capability and confidence, allowing us to build upon security conditions and deliver essential services to the people of Afghanistan.”

Allyn said Regional Command East’s main effort is “to partner with and develop the Afghan security forces to achieve security primacy and to set the conditions for security, governance and economic development” in 14 eastern provinces that are home to 7.5 million Afghans.

“Our current focus, shoulder to shoulder with our Afghan security force partners, is to expand the Kabul security zone and interdict insurgent infiltration along the 450-kilometer Afghanistan-Pakistan border,” he said.

Allyn said that over the past three months since he assumed command, he and his unit have been “witnesses to the Afghan security force and government institutions strengthening their capacity and effectiveness.”

Regional Command East is part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and is subordinate to ISAF’s Intermediate Joint Command and Marine Corps General John Allen, who is the overall ISAF commander.

In early August, Major General Allyn said, the Afghan National Police delivered 160 tons of humanitarian assistance to the citizens of Nuristan in “an extremely complex operation” that was conducted with limited assistance from coalition forces.

“In the response to the delivery of the humanitarian aid that was delivered exclusively by Afghan security forces, the people truly gained confidence and trust not only in those security forces, but in the fact that the government reached out and delivered that aid to them in advance of Ramadan,” Allyn said.

The provincial government of Kunar, led by Governor Fazlullah Wahidi, was able to respond quickly to severe flooding in August that destroyed a bridge that was the only connection for those living in the Wata Pur Valley and the Pech River Valley with the capital, Asadabad.

Allyn said Wahidi's government "responded within hours to coordinate an emergency response that not only delivered emergency aid to the people in the valley but also enabled an international response and also a coalition force response with bridging assets to restore the capability in a matter of days."

He said the response of authorities in Kunar "was a clear sign to the people of the Pech River Valley and Wata Pur Valley of the capability of their government to respond to their needs."

Allyn also said Afghan Uniformed Police recently conducted two independent operations that targeted the smuggling of ammonium nitrate from Pakistan. Prompted by their own intelligence information, the police seized more than 5,750 kilograms of ammonium nitrate, used in homemade bombs.

He said insurgents have been carrying out "ruthless, desperate and inexplicable actions" targeting the Afghan people, and that they have caused 85 to 90 percent of civilian casualties over the past 90 days.

"Their blatant disregard for the Afghan people manifests itself in suicide attacks that predominantly target innocent civilians, and ill-disciplined direct and indirect fire attacks that brutalize population centers," Allyn said. As a result, he added, there has been "increased cooperation between the Afghan people, the local government and the security forces who serve them."

He said that in several areas of his command, there have been signs that both Taliban and Haqqani insurgents are growing weary of their armed struggle. He also said he has been hearing from provincial governors that there are "significant amounts of informal offers" from Taliban leaders to participate in the Afghan government's reconciliation and reintegration efforts.

"Obviously, [the governors] ask us to keep the pressure on the insurgent groups so that they can continue to make progress in that dialogue," he said.

4. Special Representative Grossman's Op-Ed on Success in Afghanistan (08-24-2011)

This op-ed by U.S. Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan Marc Grossman was originally published by McClatchy Newspapers.

Success in Afghanistan: It takes a region

By MARC GROSSMAN

Six months ago this week, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton laid out in a speech in New York three foundations for American policy in Afghanistan: a strong military effort to defeat al-Qaida and support Afghans as they secure their sovereignty; a civilian push to promote economic development and good governance; and a diplomatic surge to support an Afghan-led reconciliation process designed to end 30 years of war.

Six months later there is progress to report. The military campaign, supported by the efforts and sacrifices of NATO and other allies and friends, has dealt the Taliban an important blow.

Afghanistan's security forces have grown by over a hundred thousand soldiers and police. The transition to Afghan security lead has begun. Because of this progress, President Obama has begun a U.S. military drawdown that will bring 33,000 American soldiers home by the end of September 2012.

There is progress in civilian reconstruction as well. Afghanistan's GDP has tripled since 2001. In 2001, 1 million Afghan children were in school - almost all boys. Today, more than 8 million children attend school - a third of them girls. Eighty percent of Afghans have access to basic health-care facilities, almost twice as many as in 2005. Half of Afghan families now have telephones; almost no one had a phone a decade ago.

We are creating the diplomatic surge Clinton called for by leveraging a broad range of contacts at many levels across Afghanistan and the region, including preliminary outreach to members of the Taliban. As part of this diplomatic effort the United States has focused special attention since February on the need for regional support for Afghanistan. Pakistan and India, Iran and China, Russia and the Central Asian republics would all benefit from an independent and stable Afghanistan integrated into a secure and prosperous South and Central Asia.

There are specific regional actions to applaud. Both Pakistani and Indian leaders have announced their support for Afghan-led reconciliation. In June, Russia, China and India joined the United States in voting to split the United Nations' Taliban and al-Qaida sanctions regimes, an endorsement of Afghan efforts to reconcile with insurgents ready to break ties with al-Qaida, renounce violence, and accept the Afghan Constitution, especially the rights of women and minorities.

Pakistan has a leading regional role to play and has legitimate interests in any reconciliation process. Islamabad has formed a Joint Peace Commission with Afghanistan, and is in regular contact about the peace process with Afghanistan and the United States. Islamabad can demonstrate its further support for Afghan-led efforts by preventing Pakistani territory from being used to destabilize Afghanistan.

Two important international conferences - a summit of regional leaders hosted by Turkey in Istanbul in early November and the "Bonn+10" conference chaired by the Afghan Government and hosted by Germany in December - should build further regional and international support for Afghanistan.

In Istanbul, Afghanistan's neighbors can commit to a stable and independent Afghanistan and define a mechanism to judge how well they live up to their commitments. In Bonn, the international community can endorse this regional vision and reaffirm a long-term investment in Afghanistan.

One other point is clear: there will be no secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan inside of a secure, stable and prosperous region without private sector fueled sustainable economic growth from Central Asia to Bangladesh. Regional power, transport, and transit infrastructure and new trade agreements will build economic connections. A vision for this "New Silk Road," launched in Bonn, would bind the region together and help Afghanistan attract new sources of investment and consumers for its goods. Afghanistan and Pakistan have just implemented a new transit trade agreement. Expansion of this agreement to Central Asia, and perhaps even to India, would create further incentives for regional cooperation.

The region's capacity to overcome old suspicions requires confidence in the international commitment to see through the current mission in Afghanistan. A new Strategic Partnership Declaration will outline the U.S. commitment to supporting Afghanistan's security forces and civilian institutions. The United States seeks neither permanent military bases in Afghanistan, nor a long-term military presence that aimed at power-projection or threatening Afghanistan's neighbors.

People in Islamabad, Astana, New Delhi and Washington have an interest in achieving a secure, increasingly prosperous Afghanistan at peace with its neighbors, and a region free from al-Qaida. Only the Afghan people can reconcile with the insurgency. But Afghanistan's neighbors must support their efforts.

There is hard work to do in each of the three areas Clinton highlighted last February and again in India in July. Building on these actions will require difficult choices and consume enormous

diplomatic energy. A status report six months from now can show further progress if the region comes together to support Afghanistan.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Marc Grossman is the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

5. U.S. Welcomes U.N. Human Rights Vote to Investigate Syria (08-24-2011)

U.S. officials welcomed the U.N. Human Rights Council's August 23 adoption of a resolution that calls for an international inquiry into possible crimes against humanity by the Syrian government. The resolution condemns the regime led by Bashar al-Assad for repeated and systematic atrocities.

In an August 23 statement, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said there are "credible reports that government forces in Syria have committed numerous gross human rights violations, including torture and summary executions, in their crackdown against opposition members."

Syrians have been holding peaceful demonstrations since March demanding that the Assad regime allow political reform and recognize their basic human rights. The regime has responded with violent crackdowns; U.S. officials have estimated that more than 2,000 Syrians have been killed by their government.

Security forces in Homs reportedly killed six protesters August 23, one day after U.N. officials visited the city to assess humanitarian needs. In her statement, Clinton said the most recent attack "is as deplorable as it is sadly representative of the Assad regime's utter disregard for the Syrian people."

The resolution to condemn Syria passed with 33 in favor, with four against and nine abstentions.

Clinton said the Commission of Inquiry's task of investigating all violations of international human rights law by the Assad regime will "help the international community address the serious human rights abuses in Syria and ensure that those responsible are held to account."

She urged countries around the world to "stand with the Syrian people in their demands for a government that represents the needs and will of its people and protects their universal rights," and said that for the sake of the Syrian people, "it is time for Assad to step aside and leave this transition to the Syrians themselves."

U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice said the Human Rights Council's action has shown that "the chorus of international condemnation against the Syrian regime has grown louder and more unified."

In an August 23 statement, Rice said the Obama administration is standing with the people of Syria and will pursue "additional action in the Security Council" to increase pressure on the Syrian regime.

Assad "has refused to lead responsibly and now must go. We have reinforced this message by applying international pressure and targeted sanctions to ensure that his regime feels the consequences of its extreme brutality," she said.

Speaking after the adoption of the resolution, Ambassador Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe, the U.S. representative to the Human Rights Council, said the vote was "a victory for the Syrian people."

The council's action shows a growing consensus that Assad has lost the legitimacy to govern, as well as "the extent to which he is now isolated," she said.

She said the United States has "not been fooled" by Assad's "empty promises of reform and engagement" with the Syrian opposition, saying his regime's continuing atrocities have "sent a loud and clear message" that the Syrian leader's promises "cannot be trusted."

“We will not stand by silently as innocent civilians and peaceful protesters are slaughtered by security forces. We are working to ramp up pressure on the Syrian authorities to help ensure that the violence ends,” Donahoe said.

See also: [Adoption of U.N. Human Rights Council’s Resolution on Syria](#)

6. Libyans Have Shown Human Dignity Is Stronger than Dictators (08-22-2011)

President Obama said the 42-year reign of Muammar Qadhafi over Libya is coming to an end, and the country’s future is now in the hands of the Libyan people.

Speaking in [an August 22 audio statement](#) from Martha’s Vineyard, Obama told the Libyan people, “The Libya that you deserve is within your reach” following the capture of most of the capital, Tripoli, by Libyan opposition forces.

“Your courage and character have been unbreakable in the face of the tyrant. An ocean divides us, but we are joined in the basic human longing for freedom, for justice and for dignity. Your revolution is your own, and your sacrifices have been extraordinary,” Obama said.

The celebrations in Libya show “the pursuit of human dignity is far stronger than any dictator,” he said, and “remind us that fear can give way to hope, and that the power of people striving for freedom can bring about a brighter day.”

The president also praised the international coalition of Arab countries, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States. The coalition was established in March to enforce a no-fly zone and an arms embargo across the country after the Arab League and the U.N. Security Council called for an intervention to protect the Libyan people from being massacred at the hands of Qadhafi’s security forces.

“The Libyan intervention demonstrates what the international community can achieve when we stand together as one” and “act together as equal partners,” Obama said.

He said NATO is “the most capable alliance in the world,” and its strength comes from “both its firepower and the power of our democratic ideals.”

The Arab members of the coalition “sent a powerful message about the unity of our effort and our support for the future of Libya,” Obama said.

With fighting continuing in some areas of Libya, the president called upon Qadhafi to reduce further bloodshed by “explicitly relinquishing power to the people of Libya and calling for those forces that continue to fight to lay down their arms for the sake of Libya.”

He also called upon Qadhafi’s opposition, the Transitional National Council (TNC), to “bring about a transition that is peaceful, inclusive and just,” and said the United States will be “a friend and a partner” in that effort.

U.S. officials are in close contact with NATO and the United Nations to determine the level of humanitarian need, and are “working to ensure that critical supplies reach those in need, particularly those who’ve been wounded,” Obama said.

Earlier August 22, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton spoke with members of the Libya Contact Group, a coalition of Arab and non-Arab representatives that is leading international efforts to support the political transition in Libya. State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland said the political directors of the contact group will meet in Istanbul August 25.

Clinton also telephoned TNC Chairman Mustafa Abdul Jalil and expressed U.S. support for the Libyan people as they “begin a new chapter in Libya’s history,” Nuland said.

The secretary discussed ways that the international community can help Libya with the tasks of protecting civilians, providing key services, and assembling a new and inclusive government to replace the Qadhafi regime.

“This must be and will be a Libyan-led transition,” Nuland said.

She said U.S. officials were encouraged by Jalil’s calls for reconciliation among the Libyan people and for the country to be unified.

U.S. officials are “cautiously optimistic” as a result of what they’ve seen in the liberated parts of Tripoli so far, Nuland said. “We don’t need any more civilian life lost in Libya,” she added.

The TNC has stated that they intend to hold Qadhafi, his sons and other regime leaders accountable for their actions.

“This is going to be a decision that needs to be Libyan-led as we go forward,” Nuland said. “Our focus is that they be brought to justice, that accountability be had for their crimes and that the judicial process meets international standards.”

7. U.S. Condemns Continuing Brutality of Syrian Regime (08-22-2011)

U.S. Ambassador Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe said in Geneva August 22 that the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is carrying out significant acts of brutality against anti-government opponents and that “innocent civilians are being massacred.”

“We have documentary evidence that they’ve used tanks, machine guns, grenades and snipers against peaceful protesters, human rights defenders,” Donahoe told reporters at the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva. Donahoe is the U.S. permanent representative to the council.

The Geneva-based Human Rights Council met for the second time since April on allegations that the Assad regime has committed significant human rights violations against the Syrian people. The session was held shortly after a U.N. human rights investigatory panel recommended to the U.N. Security Council that Syria be referred to the International Criminal Court for prosecution of alleged crimes.

“There’s growing unity and resolve that Assad must go,” Donahoe added. “He’s lost the legitimacy to rule the Syrian people.”

Compounding the urgency for international action, Donahoe said, is that the special representative of the U.N. secretary-general on children and armed conflict has let the Human Rights Council know that there are credible allegations of torture of children by Syrian security forces.

“We condemn, in the strongest terms, the ongoing slaughter and callous brutality unleashed by the Assad regime against the Syrian people,” Donahoe said during the council’s special session.

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay told the 47-nation council that more than 2,200 people have been killed in Syria in the five-month-old crackdown. Donahoe told reporters that the United States supports accountability for atrocities against the Syrian people.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told Assad in a telephone call August 17 that “all military operations and mass arrests must cease immediately,” a U.N. statement said.

“Everyone knows that the human rights crisis has deteriorated significantly in the last few weeks,” Donahoe said. “The high commissioner for human rights has come out and indicated that there are credible allegations of systematic and widespread human rights violations that may amount to crimes against humanity.”

Donahoe said the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the European Union have urged Assad to immediately stop the violence, and President Obama has asked Assad to step down and allow the Syrian people to move toward a peaceful and democratic future.

The purpose of the special session on August 22 was to convince Assad that he must step down and the violence must stop, she added.

“The specific outcome we hope for is the establishment of a commission of inquiry to investigate facts on the ground in Syria and to bring the Syrian authorities who are responsible for the atrocities to account,” Donahoe said.

“To the brave people of Syria who are demanding freedom and dignity, we send the message that the world stands by you, and we will not ignore your plight,” she added.

8. U.N.: Syria’s Attacks May Be “Crimes Against Humanity” (08-19-2011)

Syrian crackdown on protesters may amount to crimes against humanity – UN report

The Syrian Government’s “widespread and systematic” attacks against its own people may amount to crimes against humanity and warrant an investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC), the United Nations human rights office said in a report released today.

The Report of the Fact-finding Mission on Syria was produced by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in response to a request by the UN Human Rights Council.

The mission found “a pattern of human rights violations that constitutes widespread or systematic attacks against the civilian population, which may amount to crimes against humanity,” states the report, which covers events from 15 March to 15 July. The violations include murder, enforced disappearances, torture, deprivation of liberty, and persecution.

As many as 2,000 Syrians have been killed in the past five months since the start of the pro-democracy protests, which are part of a broader uprising across North Africa and the Middle East that has led to the toppling of long-standing regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and conflict in Libya.

“The daily toll of killing and human rights abuses must halt immediately, and the perpetrators of serious human rights violations must be held accountable,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay told the Security Council when she presented the findings of the report.

“Every indication is that the pattern of widespread or systematic violations of human rights uncovered by the fact-finding mission is continuing today,” she added. “Indeed, witnesses on the ground have told my office that the scale of military and security operations has in fact escalated in the past two weeks.”

As Syria did not provide OHCHR access to the country, the findings in the report are based primarily on the mission’s analysis of first-hand information obtained through interviews conducted with victims and witnesses.

The 13-member mission, headed by Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Kyung-wha Kang, gathered corroborative eyewitness statements with respect to numerous summary executions, including 353 named victims, and describes the disproportionate use of force by Syrian military and security forces.

The report states that, while demonstrations have been largely peaceful, the military and security forces have resorted to excessive force. Accounts from defecting security officers, corroborated by the location of bullet wounds on the dead, indicate an apparent “shoot-to-kill” policy, noted Ms. Pillay.

The report adds that “children have not only been targeted by security forces, but they have been repeatedly subject to the same human rights and criminal violations as adults, including torture, with no consideration for their vulnerable status.

“The fact that Syrian forces have tortured or killed children on several occasions, in what are clearly not isolated incidents, causes grave concern,” it states.

Ms. Pillay recalled the principle agreed in 2005 by all UN Member States, by which each State has the responsibility to protect its populations from crimes against humanity and other international crimes.

“By failing to heed calls by the international community to cease all military and paramilitary operations against population centres, the Government of Syria is manifestly failing to fulfil its responsibility to protect the Syrian population from such crimes,” she stated.

Under such circumstances, she said, the Security Council may wish to consider referring the situation in Syria to the ICC.

“It is vital that the Security Council conveys to the people of Syria the message that their protection is of utmost concern for the international community and that the United Nations supports their struggle for fundamental rights and freedoms,” she added.

In an interview with UN TV, Ms. Pillay said that “what is most outrageous is that the people targeted are civilians who are exercising their legitimate rights, which are taken for granted in most democracies. It is shocking then that the President and his security forces could fire and kill those people.”

“We are all hoping that the [Syrian] President [Bashar al-Assad] will carry out his intentions of stopping killings immediately, carrying out urgently needed reforms, and my office is there to assist in enabling the country to conduct serious reforms,” she said.

She said the report had identified 50 individuals who bear the most responsibility for the atrocities. Their names will be kept in confidence until OHCHR received a request by either a national or an international investigations body, such as the ICC, to share the list.

“When asked we will share this information. The 50 individuals named are all high level. People in positions of authority,” said Ms. Pillay.

In the report, Ms. Pillay also recommends that Syria immediately put an end to the gross human rights violations, as well as allow immediate access for humanitarian workers to assist those in need and for OHCHR to conduct investigations into all abuses.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made the same appeal in a telephone conversation yesterday with Mr. Assad, during which the UN chief expressed appreciation that the Government had agreed to receive a UN humanitarian assessment mission and was assured that it would have access to different sites in the country.

Also briefing the Council today was Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Valerie Amos, who told reporters afterwards that there will be an initial humanitarian assessment mission to Syria at the weekend. “We have been guaranteed that we will have full access to anywhere that we wish to go,” she said.

The assessment team will be led by Rashid Khalikov, the director of the Geneva office of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The Human Rights Council will hold a second special session on the situation of human rights in Syria on Monday in Geneva.
